

Bad Liar(s) by Luddleston

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Summary:

It doesn't take Mel long to notice that Jayce and Viktor are pretending to be romantically involved.

The question is *why*?

Bad Liar(s)

Author's Note:

This is fully, completely inspired by Viktor going "wait, this isn't my bedroom...?" when he's trying to sneak in to steal Jayce's lab equipment back. Viktor why is your first go-to that you're taking the man to your bedroom? Viktor????

— I. —

Mel knew the instant she saw Jayce and Viktor together that something was suspicious.

Of course *something* was suspicious. They were very clearly breaking into Heimerdinger's laboratory, which was an offense to both the Council and the Academy. Not that Mel had any questions as to *why*—she was wandering about because she fully expected Jayce, at least, to come searching, the boy's conviction was impressive—no, it was their alibi that caught her attention.

"This isn't my bedroom..."

Viktor was clearly lying. Mel didn't know his name, then, it was just 'Heimerdinger's assistant, the tall gangly one that sort of looks like a sad cat that's been left in the rain'. Not that she would refer to him that way aloud. She didn't refer to him aloud at all, really. Back then, before he was Jayce Talis' right hand man, he faded into the background almost entirely.

Why in the world his go-to excuse was that he was *taking Jayce to bed*, Mel had no idea. She would have wondered about it and then ignored it, if not for what happened during the next few years. It felt like a slip of the tongue, an innuendo where one didn't intend to place it.

Which makes it all the stranger, now that the two of them have begun faking a relationship.

— II. —

She catches them at it during a conference. Reporters are always swarming Jayce at these, and he's always drawing Viktor to his side, making sure that his accomplishments don't go unnoticed. Of course, they go unnoticed anyway. Viktor is an undercity transplant who's more intelligent than he is charismatic, and Jayce is a handsome golden boy from a humble House but a House nonetheless, and Piltover is eager to raise him to glory. Viktor does not seem perturbed by this, from what Mel can see—which she doesn't quite understand. She'd be livid.

Then again, maybe Viktor always expected to be overlooked, and any recognition was already a surprise.

"My *partner*, Viktor," Jayce is saying again, putting special emphasis on the word. Viktor is standing without his cane tonight. Mel thinks he's ditched the mobility aid to appeal to old-fashioned nobles who think all bright inventors should be healthy young men in their prime. Either that, or it's pride. Viktor, despite his lack of concern about proper credit for his accomplishments, seems quite proud.

This means he's leaning on Jayce's arm. And that, naturally, leads to a young man who's had his eye on Jayce this whole time, asking, "partner in just business? I hope it's not too tasteless to ask." He gives an airy laugh but his eyes glitter with an eagerness that's sharp and difficult to hide. It's as if he's playing cards with his whole hand facing the rest of the table.

"Partner in everything," Jayce says, neatly. "Why, in fact, this whole adventure of creating Hextech would not have begun without Viktor's help." He launches into explaining their research, Viktor's contribution, et cetera. Mel mostly catches the way the gentleman's face falls when he is convinced by their lie.

Well, she understands the sentiment. Jayce is very good looking.

Even if he is an absolutely awful liar. Mel doesn't believe him for a second—anybody who was actually introducing a significant other would not

immediately turn to talk of business. But it seems to be enough to keep away any undesired attention for the time being.

— III. —

Mel is presiding over a meeting between the Council of Piltover and Hextech Industries when a woman, a young researcher, if she recalls correctly, dashes in, making apologetic nods of her head to everybody she passes as she scurries over to Jayce, leaning in to talk.

Mel is close enough to hear, having made it a habit to sit beside Jayce at these things so that she can glean more on what exactly is happening behind the scenes at Hextech. Jayce is famous for writing everything down, bringing pages and pages of notes. If he doesn't want those adjacent to him taking a peek, he ought not to bring them. Particularly the financial reports. They look good—Mel makes a note to invest more capital in them. If he was smart, he'd maneuver them to look even better, but Jayce isn't the sort of person who thinks that way.

"It's Viktor—he fell, in the lab."

"What?" There's a stricken look of horror on Jayce's face.

The researcher nervously adjusts her glasses. "He was there overnight—I told him he needed to go home and get some rest—he passed out—low blood sugar, or something."

Jayce's chair scrapes across the floor as he shoves it back and stands, clears his throat, and addresses the room at large. "I'm sorry, everyone, I have to adjourn early."

With that, he's gathering up all his notes, ignoring the way his researcher friend presses her lips into a flat line in the universal symbol of 'you're doing something very stupid, Jayce Talis'. "They're not going to let you in to see him, you're not family," she says, thinking one step ahead of Jayce, which is not hard. Jayce is either two steps behind or fifty steps ahead of everybody else.

"I'll think of something," he says, and he races out.

Mel stands, as well, much more gracefully, and asks Elora to please make her excuses. Then, she follows Jayce, because he truly does look panicked, and he doesn't need to go making a scene in the middle of a hospital.

"Councilor Medarda," Jayce says over his shoulder, "I'm sorry, I really can't talk."

"I rather think you would appreciate my help."

He's getting into a carriage. She follows him in, but he doesn't acknowledge that she's doing it, too preoccupied. He rattles off the name of the hospital, and then sinks back in his seat, rubbing at his brows and sighing. He is disgustingly emotive. One can tell what he's thinking from the barest glance.

He finally seems to remember her presence, taking longer to do so than she would allow most. "What exactly do you intend to do to help?"

"Doors open when I approach them," she says. "I was going to help you get in. I doubt they will allow you past simply because you're pretending to be his lover."

"I was gonna tell them I'm his husband, actually." He doesn't even take a second to deny that they're faking it. Incredible. How has the entire world not discovered their ruse?

"Well, I don't know if you're aware, but you've become far too well-known to pretend to be somebody's husband," Mel says. "Everybody in Piltover considers you an eligible bachelor."

He looks even more disconcerted than he was prior. "With respect, Councilor, I don't want to talk about this."

"As you wish." She inclines her head gracefully and wonders why the hell she's even helping him. Maybe it's because he looks like a sad, lost puppy.

"Thank you, though. For your help."

Maybe it's because she likes, in a strange little part of herself, that he's the slightest bit indebted to her now.

If Mel knew how to make friends any other way, she'd probably try it out on Jayce.

— IV. —

Viktor is fine following the incident, and two weeks later he and Jayce are laying it on thicker than ever at this year's Progress Day. Ever since Hextech was incorporated and started making the news, it's all anybody can talk about at the annual celebration of innovation and technology. Viktor normally eschews the social events, but Jayce has him at his side the whole time this year, with an arm around him, or a hand on his back.

There's a bit of strain to them, possibly because Jayce is worried about Viktor about his recent injury (he'd fainted, Mel eventually found out, because he became so invested in his research he did not stop to eat or sleep, and now Jayce is trying to feed him at every possible moment). It's also possibly because they're really trying to sell it. If one thing Mel said to him really had to stick, did it *have* to be some inconsequential remark about the city at large assuming he's an eligible bachelor?

He truly is determined to look as little like one as possible.

He leans in to whisper something to Viktor, close enough contact that Viktor looks deeply uncomfortable. Maybe if they wanted to strike up a hoax of a romance, they should have done it with somebody they weren't so awkward around. Are either of them even *interested* in men? She'd bet they're both only interested in science.

"Your drink, my lady."

Mel's own admirer, a sweet gentleman who's far too keen on social climbing for her to ever want more than a single night's fling with him, has returned to steal her attention.

And he's got a nice face and a nicer body, so she's fine with having her attention stolen, even if her mind is working over the details of Viktor and Jayce's failing plot as she leads her date to another part of the celebration.

— V. —

Mel doesn't ordinarily hand-deliver gifts to anybody even though she does, on a yearly basis, make a habit of sending something or another to everybody she works with to remind them that she is a kind and generous person, and to perhaps nudge along any business arrangements they might have been considering striking up.

She does bring Jayce's gift to him directly, though. It is entirely likely he won't appreciate the wine any more or less than a cheap bottle you could buy at the market, but his financial manager is getting the same bottle, and *she* has good taste.

Hextech Laboratories is a veritable maze, but Mel has been here on a few occasions, usually on tours as the staff shows the council their latest and greatest. It means she knows where Jayce's office is, and nobody stops her on her way in, because why would they? Mel has built up a reputation of being Jayce Talis' personal friend, whether or not Jayce knows it.

She is stopped once she enters his office, by a soft voice saying, "Councilor?"

It's Viktor, seated beside Jayce's desk in a chair that looks to be ergonomically designed for him specifically. He's got a pair of spectacles on and a book of Jayce's notes in front of him, the blocky, entirely capitalized handwriting Mel hadn't realized until now that she's become used to seeing.

"Viktor. I came by with a gift for Mr. Talis, if he is available?"

Viktor frowns, but Viktor is often frowning. It just means he's considering. "If I may be frank, Councilor Medarda, sometimes I do wonder about your intentions with Jayce."

"You sound like an overprotective father." She sets the bottle on the desk and then leans against it. "I thought you were supposed to be his lover."

She's not expecting the reaction she gets from Viktor. He colors, snatches his glasses off his face and looks at her with affront.

"We—Jayce, and I—what exactly do you presume is the case between us?" Viktor asks.

"Well, it is clear you were never a couple." She watches him carefully but speaks with a casual air, smoothing out her skirt and plucking an imaginary piece of lint from it. "I'm not sure who you thought you were fooling."

"Nobody," Viktor says. "Why would we be fooling anybody?"

"Any number of reasons. Status, for you. A deterrent to potential admirers, for Jayce. A love story that takes eyes off anything unsavory Hextech might be participating in."

"Do you really think that Jayce would participate in that sort of subterfuge?" Viktor is truly angry with this assumption, practically spitting at her. It's insubordinate at best. "No. No, you do not know what you are witnessing, Councilor."

"Then tell me," she says. "What am I witnessing?"

He's silent for a moment, his mouth working but not words issuing from him. Then he leans over, balancing his elbow on the arm of his chair and putting his face in his hand. "What, indeed." He makes a sigh that seems like it should blow his wispy frame away. "You know, I feel I really ought not to tell you. I do not think my secrets are safe with you."

"The worst you could tell me is that you are orchestrating this without Jayce's knowledge and consent," Mel says.

"No!"

She shrugs. "See? Then anything you tell me is no worse than what my own mind could concoct."

"Your mind," he says, seemingly having decided to be completely candid with her, "sounds like a terrifying place."

"Quite."

Another sigh. "I have been working with Jayce for years, now. We have our own private celebration every year, you know? Not of the day Hextech was announced to the world, of the night we spent formulating it together."

She is silent, allowing him to continue rather than acknowledging anything he's saying.

"It was about a month ago, now." He folds his hands in his lap, looks down at them instead of up at her. "He kissed me. I... needed time to think. But then I worked myself until I couldn't think anymore." He shakes his head.

She begins to re-frame. Jayce's pure panic about Viktor hurting himself. Viktor, collapsing when he always seems to manage his condition as well as he can. The two of them close by one another at the Progress Day celebration but awkward and uncomfortable about it.

"You thought we were pretending to be in some kind of relationship? Jayce doesn't have that sort of subterfuge in him."

"When I first saw you, your excuse was that you were heading for your bedroom," she says. It feels a little silly, now. She wonders if Viktor even remembers saying such a thing.

He finally cracks a smile. "Of course I did, I was sneaking around after dark with a handsome man. An academy student, no less, while I was assistant to the Dean. It would have been a scandal, but not a terrible one. Better than the alternative. So, yes, I suppose I was lying, there."

"Perhaps I have given you more credit that you deserve, when it comes to social plotting," she says, giving him a smile of her own. Now, she can't help but wonder if Jayce is *exclusively* interested in men. The more one looks at him, the more one wants...

Never mind.

"Did you have your time to think?" she asks him.

"What do you think I'm in here for? I'm waiting for him."

Well, if there was ever a time to make an exit, it's this. "Open that bottle," she says, tapping it with one finger. "It might help."

She passes Jayce on her way out. He looks a bit bewildered, but that is a default expression for him.

— VI. —

Tonight, Mel actually is working late. There is talk of using Hextech to create massive portals that will allow vessels of all kinds to travel between lands far and wide. As a Medarda, Mel will need to be at the front of this incredible step in business, and it's had her in her office late into the night on many occasions.

Jayce may not have a seat on the Council (yet. Mel's working toward it. If only Heimerdinger would retire, Jayce would be a natural replacement) but he does have an office in the same wing as Mel's, if only so he can host meetings with the Councilors without having to escort them all to the messy heart of Hextech Industries. It's a neat, formal conference room, with a long table which the Councilors usually tend to sit at in the same arrangement they take up in their chambers.

There is a glass door to his office which serves mostly as a light source, because it's around an odd corner but faces a window, and when Mel notices the lights on inside, she turns to investigate, wondering if she should poke her head in and attempt to wheedle any additional information about these "Hexgates" from Jayce.

She stops just shy of actually approaching the door, when she catches a glimpse of what's inside.

Jayce is sitting in one of the high-backed leather chairs, in quite bold view of the door (although it's unlikely anybody else is in this late). He has Viktor on his lap, sitting sideways, like a princess—one of his arms is wound behind Viktor's back to support him, the other hand tucked under his knees to keep him close. Jayce is bent forward to kiss him.

It's clearly a position they've sat in before, there is no need for adjustment. Jayce has him situated so that there's no need for Viktor to put pressure on sore limbs. It's considerate down to the basest level, which isn't typical of Jayce. He considers the big picture, the grand scale, not the minute actions.

But, with the way Viktor's fingers smooth over his temple and down his cheekbone as they kiss without ceasing, how could he not consider the details?

Mel finds herself rolling her eyes. If they actually *are* trying to keep secrets this time, they're doing just as awful a job at it as she'd previously presumed. She walks towards them, letting her heels click ungracefully noisily. If they're going to do this, they're going to have to be better about not getting caught.

Viktor is still in Jayce's arms when she enters the room. He can't move fast enough, dart away to another seat before somebody notices. Especially not if he's working all day. She's seen him, he walks with a more pronounced limp in the evenings.

"A few recommendations for you, gentlemen," she says, by way of introduction. "Sit in that chair, it cannot be seen from the door. And turn the lights off, else you will attract attention."

She turns on her heel and leaves before they can utter anything more than incoherent stammering. She doesn't want to hear any excuses.

They're terrible liars, both of them.

Author's Note:

Find me on Twitter [@luddlestons!](https://twitter.com/luddlestons) I talk about Arcane but also the Iliad a lot on there.